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Gender and rhetoric in category construction

Carmel Forde
Dalhousie University

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Title: Gender and rhetoric in category construction

Author: [Carmel Forde](#)

Response to this paper by: [Jerome Bickenbach](#)

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Part One: crisis

Evelyn Fox Keller speaks about a kind of mental dancing, she calls the "one-two step" - and the "two-one" step, in a paper outlining issues giving rise to a "crisis in definition", especially among social categories like "men" and "women". Referring to the frequent replacement of the term *gender*, by the term *women*, when she tells people she works on gender and science: "how interesting [they say] ... what is it that you've learned about women in science?" She calls that "stage one; two genders and one science ... the subject of gender and science is fairly boring for those who stay at this stage." In stage two "a slight increase in sophistication leads us to see these claims as referring to "stereotypes" about gender Now the subject of gender and science becomes translated into "women aren't really unfitted for science; they are only said to be so (i.e. the world is truly unitary, divided only in appearance, either (merely) by language or (merely) by social convention. Our task is to restore its natural unity." This she calls the two-one step; the move that has been taken by women in science, because they were afraid that "being different meant being less." (Kirkup and Keller, 1992, 42)

Those women who wanted to become scientists argued they were **not** different, but there was a problem with this strategy. "Different from whom? [she says] "The problem of the hidden referent in this strategy appeared not to concern early feminists as much as modern ones the problem that inheres in the fact that the universal standard is after all not neutral, of what happens to our strategy and our thinking about gender and science when we begin to notice that the universal man, is, in fact male. The first thing this recognition enables us to do is to begin to make sense of the failure of the promise of equity. To be included in the big "one" means not to be equally represented, but to be unrepresented. It is to be swallowed up whole, negated in the quest for assimilation - as it were, a hole in "one"." Fox Keller recognizes some central features of the crisis, the politics of neutrality, the politics of universality.

Denise Riley suggests that "the impermanence of collective identities in general is a problem for any emancipatory movement." (Riley, 1992, 16) Since a collectivity is comprised of a great variety of people, among whom there is no single unifying feature, save their membership in the movement itself, and since even the style and character of membership varies among persons, critics rail against there being a "women's movement", and an "anti-racism" movement. Sedgwick and others have called this a "definitional crisis" - this refers to the idea that the *coherence* of definition is in crisis. Sedgwick specifically refers to masculinity, explaining "that the crisis is systemic and endemic is enabled only, and precisely, by its denial of the same fact." (Sedgwick, 1990, 20)

A significant example of the "definitional crisis" is the suggested "paradox" of feminism. "Women" do not want to be labeled, identified in any universal fashion, neither by properties related to observers nor by properties which are inherent, say, to "experiences" of women, not essentialized - and at the same time - they mount liberatory movements, such as the feminist movement. Is this

not a contradiction? For many observers of this crisis, if gender categories are shown to be unstable, or confused, then "gender" itself has to be seen to be irrelevant, invalidated. Thus "women" is incoherent.

Some reformulations of concept theory, such as prototype theory, allow that there are differences amongst members, but at the same time provide a prototypical member, against whom alleged members are compared. Attempting to employ anatomical or other similarities, as in contemporary methods to provide a category "women" - there are suggested common properties among women. Suppose prototype theory of concepts to be the case, that members of the category will resemble a prototype: but not all members will have any one of the same properties, in the least; not all women will be white; not all will have two breasts, or will bear children, or will be heterosexual. Not all will consider their gender as the primary category in their descriptions - their race, their ethnicity, their sexual orientation might figure first, any of the other relational identities after it in various orders. Thus, from the point of view of subjective experiences, even though the experiences of women might differ radically from those of men, there is no universally essential mode of "women's" experiences. Further, "women" are variously abled, and their abilities might figure first in their identities. Not all women are feminists, and not all feminists are liberals, or socialists or feminists of difference. Not all women are similarly oppressed; many are multiply oppressed, some oppressions figure as more central to some women than to others - class - race - gender. Still, essential to the problem here is that gender categories are pervasive, woven throughout every sphere, every discourse of contemporary culture. Categories structured around universals are politically *homogenizing* and the role of signification in the construction of subjectivities is absent from such categories.

Philosophy has a line on how "instability of terms" affects arguments, since identification of meaning, and its consistent use in an argument, is important for good reasoning. An argument founders, where the meanings of terms shift within it. For traditional views, "obversion" operates (on terms) - deduction operates - on truths - as does induction. Contraposition operates; but instability, inconsistency, is supposed to be absent from, not constitutive of, philosophical reasoning. Evidence and meaning are constitutive of good form; consistency of meaning is essential for argument operation. Instability is lack of clarity, lack of rigour, nonargumentative. What then, should one make of the classical feminist interpretations of the history of philosophy, such as The Man of Reason, in which, for example, Genevieve Lloyd argues that although there is an "ideal of a Reason which knows no sex", that Reason has been constituted through the exclusion of what has been perceived as "the feminine". Even though Reason has been historically associated with masculinity, Lloyd shows that associations of reason and masculinity are very unstable in their applications. For Lloyd, the masculine character of reason is enabled in spite of contradictions in the main texts of the canon. While significant concepts do undergo change in meaning in the "canon," that is, "mind", "knowledge", "sensing", "reason", do not have the same ascription across the works of Plato, Descartes, or Kant, still, they may all still be "gendered".

Many inconsistencies in the treatment of the category "women" have been documented by various writers, such as Genevieve Lloyd, and feminists show how "binarism" is hard to pin down. Men are aligned with mind, and women with body; but men are also associated with physical strength, women with bodily weakness. Women are linked with men, as participating in reason, and alternately are aligned with nature, as being bodily. Men are associated with

God, as reasoning beings and against bodily elements, and shown to be different from God, as being bodily, thus in unstable positions themselves, in relation to the deity. These are simple examples of much more complex issues, such as the following.

J.L. Halley argues that it is the very instability of definition concerning homosexual identity which is crucial to the 'coercive' power of the homophobic law. (Epstein & Kraub, 1991, 356) She claims that the incoherence within the definition of homosexual, for American laws, functions in such a way as to maintain the power of the law against homosexuals' actions and relations: but undercutting it is the supposed binary opposition of heterosexual/homosexual relations, which is undermined by its own instability in relation to homosexuality. Halley discusses the instabilities in the definitions of homosexuality - in American legal judgments. For example, homosexuality has been described as genetic, embedded in one's genes, as an abnormality, not a chosen life style (Halley 1991,359). On the other hand, homophobic judgments in the law are often rendered with the excuse that familiarity with homosexuals can prove dangerous for those who are heterosexual - or at least who do not claim to be homosexual. "A key rationale for anti-homosexual discriminations, then, is anxiety about the ambiguity of heterosexual interactions, about a potential for mutability that undermines heterosexual identity. Lest the change actually take place, "known" homosexuals must be segregated". (Halley 1991, 367). The differing forms of explanations of homosexuality, featured in these definitions, allow for such interplay of conflicting definitions, continue and "intensify a poisonous social discourse." (Halley, 1991, 356)

Categories have been associated with venn diagrammatic constructions, in discourses which insist upon essential features. In syllogistic logic, inclusion and exclusion laws were fairly clearly fixed, the manner of identification is clear, for tables, chairs, and for categories like men, women, human, and animal. The strength of nominalism has always been its recognition that we construct concepts, that concepts can change over time; but its weakness is a focus upon a search for commonalities, for properties with which to establish "naming" as such, when applied to social categories. Nominal definitions are of a noun, usually a common noun, to give its linguistic meaning, and "women", among other social categories, is understood as a common noun. "Typically [the definition] is in terms of macrosensible characteristics : e.g. yellow malleable metal, for gold." (Dictionary of philosophy) Nominalism, in spite of its strengths, presents inadequate features for analysing social categories like "women". When politics is encapsulated in the naming of a group of persons, where such actions name and define upon those named, affecting their lives, having political consequences, it is essential to recognize both the logic and rhetoric of categories, the context of socio-political, and philosophical, construction.

Categories have been linked to stereotypes, wherein resemblance is based on judgments made on the basis of incomplete information, which mimics "knowledge" in a vague and usually crude manner. Lorraine Code says "women do not simply don a stereotype as they might a costume or a role; this is not a matter of superficial overlay. They are encoded by, marked with stereotypes, from earliest infancy." (Code 1991, 190)

Here again, categories and stereotypes are linked by nominalist (stereotyping properties) and realist (essentialist stereotyping) conditions, but without acknowledgement of the "accumulated cultural lore" which backgrounds the stereotype. As sources of knowledge, they give information about identities, by

noticing "properties", and ignoring the rhetorical underwritings of socio-political structures informing the generalizations.

Where it is a case of metaphysical realism, where "real" definitions are said to specify metaphysically necessary and sufficient conditions for being the kind of thing a common noun designates - e.g. the elements with the atomic number 79 for gold - the essentializing tendencies of realism are inadequate for the construction of social categories. Furthermore, these are still property based; atomic number a property of all gold; common to all gold, just as the attempts to describe a universally figured "women's way of knowing", is essentializing. The term "metaphysical" - implying a universality amongst the entities which comprise the category. Nominalists might argue that universals are simply names organizing particulars, but these names have been based in a sorting through commonable attributes, and further, have political consequences. Although only individuals exist for nominalists, the connections among them are through properties.

Where membership in traditional categories has been given by some common property - in the relevant sense of being a "thing and its properties" - among the individuals which constitute the set or class, members are those individuals that have all the same relevant properties. Each set divides the universe into distinct realms, excluding the possibility of individuals that belong to neither or to both of these realms, where the realms are women and men. Feminist philosophers justifiably critique this formulation of categories, and reject notions of identity arising from them.

This failure on the part of feminists to accept nominalist or realist accounts in toto, results in what is meant to be the core of the general complaint against "postmodernists", among whom are included many poststructuralists, that anti-essentialism results in meaninglessness. Since the category "women" will not hold up under any "property" scrutiny, it is considered compromised, and thus meaningless itself. In my view such a critique has no bearing on the actualities, there is no such "meaninglessness"; the feminist critique is rather evidence of an attempt to recognize particular kinds of categories as not adequately met by those which investigate common properties, so to rid them of their problematic original formulations, and acknowledge their complexities. This, it seems, is a rather sensible *philosophical* enterprise. Essentialism is a way of defining which "reifies" the **attributes** associated with a particular category, such as women. It finds "unchanging" properties in entities, neglecting to notice the influence of language, culture, and social relations, which produce and influence the way categories are understood, and the stereotypes which many employ in their use. The feminist critique notices the influences of language, culture, social relations, recognizes the production of categories as quite distinct from those which employ an analysis applicable to a "thing and its properties".

Part Two - Rhetoric and philosophy

Michael Billig, who spoke at OSSA in 1997, argued that rhetoric "provides the means of opening up matters for thought and discussion", and notices that it may also provide the means for closing down topics, and thereby, be an avenue for repressive practices. For him, "language can be expressive and repressive." (Billig, 1996, 1). While he wanted to point out that in ordinary speech, "that to which we are not attending" is of interest, and can be unconscious rhetoric, and thus not applied specifically to this issue, I believe the structure of his account would be sympathetic. It is important to acknowledge the presence of rhetoric in the construction of social categories,

and see the interaction of rhetoric as both possibly positive and possibly negative, in philosophical treatment. Philosophy is only apparently built upon non-contradiction.

In this section, I describe some uses of rhetoric in philosophical texts, examples of acceptable and unacceptable employment of rhetoric by philosophers. I undermine any philosophy/ rhetoric exclusivity, in support of such philosophers as Le Doeuff, in showing that social categories have a rhetorical dimension.

One way in which rhetoric has functioned in philosophical argument is very simple. In order to highlight some feature of a philosopher's work, a writer will "downplay" some other alleged centrality, to expose the significance of the first feature. This is one way of being rhetorical, that most of us use regularly when we isolate some structure, some logic, some conceptual analysis in a text, and de-emphasize some other. This is an acceptable, and commonplace use of rhetorical devices.

Michele Le Doeuff discusses the various and significant parts that images play in the philosophical enterprise. Images are threaded throughout all philosophical work, and are powerful cases of rhetorical positioning.

"Interpretation of imagery in philosophical texts goes together with a search for points of tension in a work. In other words, such imagery is inseparable from the difficulties, the sensitive points of an intellectual venture ... the meaning conveyed by images works both for and against the system that deploys them.

" (Le Doeuff, 1980, 3) One could scarcely understand the point of someone else's ideas without the imagery contained within it. Consider how distinct are the images of an organic nature, and nature as a machine, and the contributions to our understanding of the significance of the differences between the two formulations of nature, that the imagery itself structures. Scientific models based in such metaphors differ radically. (Longino, Fox Keller, Harding) Le Doeuff refers us to some pages of Bacon, where he mentions "mental trip ... the shores of error ... island of truth ... mighty ocean ... storms of illusion" - in Kant, that we should "fix our dwelling in the land of understanding, and prevent the understanding, which has at last applied itself to its proper, empirical employment, from wandering off elsewhere." (Le Doeuff, 1980, 11) Here, Kant's understanding has a "proper use", but can "wander off", can be misemployed, this image having a disapproving, moralistic tone, about its wandering off on other "ventures".

Feminists recognize that such spatial relations as "internal" and "external" are metaphorical, and not simply "descriptive" in the sense traditionally meant by "factually" descriptive. Logic too includes images; it includes some geometrical imagery, e.g. in venn diagrams, images of exclusion, inclusion; paradoxes and contradictions; the image for the negation of "A", a claim, is chaos, that is to say, a claim and its contradictory cannot be the case: from a contradiction, chaos follows. Everything follows, and so, meaninglessness. Philosophy has always employed imagery, "imagery and knowledge form ... a common system," says Le Doeuff. Sometimes philosophers have given excuses for using imagery, as though it were important to explain why such "nonphilosophical" strategy was present in a text, but much of the time, it is simply employed, and its significance denied. Le Doeuff argues that the contradictory status of imagery serves to uphold philosophical arguments; and since it is present but at the same time denied, it is not taken seriously.

In connection with contradictories, the contradictory definitions that have been ascribed to women have also functioned to sustain the power dynamics of

certain forms of naming "women" and identifying them. In philosophy, just as in other works, textual conflicts are rhetorical, they work to maintain certain power dynamics; certain centralities in functioning, just as we saw in the case of Halley and American legal judgments cited earlier. Sometimes instability in a given site of sexual or gender category has effects which are anything but destabilising, as we've seen in the case of Halley and the definitions of homosexuality as a category of sexual orientation. By containing both assertions that women lack reason, in particular ways (say in Rousseau) and are closer to reason (because of their closeness to nature), by shifting definitions both of reason, nature, and also of "women", a text can protect itself from some critiques through ambiguities. Furthermore, there is an issue relating to such awareness of contradictions; pointing out a contradiction does not necessarily have the effect of making changes in consciousness of the work. Pointing out instability can actually have the effect of solidifying it.

"Trouble", as Butler calls it, has been central to the understanding of "women", in the philosophical canon. The history of philosophy has not generated stable accounts of women and femininity; so in employing the structures of nominalism, or realism, contemporary philosophers miss a central feature of feminist debates: the history of philosophy has been shot through with ambivalent attitudes, with incoherence, contradictions in association between masculinity and reason, femininity and reason. Instability can open up, or close down, discourses.

Part Three: Rhetoric and social categories

Feminists have generated various ways of treating categories, so as to give new insights which recognize the realities of rhetoric in gender construction. In Am I that Name?, Denise Riley calls the category of women a changing "compacted doctrine"; this description emphasises the ideological component in such a category, identifying part of the rhetorical status of social categories. The "doctrine" in question is about Otherness, differences, "women are established by and against altering categories of nature, class, reason, human." She argues it is necessary to embrace the contradiction that women "don't exist, and yet there is a women's movement." In suggesting that we embrace the contradiction, she is using a rhetorical device, which one can recognize for what it is, accepting on the one hand that "women" are not universalizable, and still, we can have the movement. Yet she does not go far enough in understanding the significance of the apparent paradox, and thus makes a "category" mistake.

Riley says, "The world behaves as though "women" unambiguously exist; and official suppositions and conservative popular opinions have to be countered constantly by redefinitions. Identity depends upon context, is double edged; and feminists at one and the same time must concentrate on the identities given, and refuse them, since it is the case with identities that they can be wielded against you just as often as in your favour." (Riley, 1988, 112) Again, issues surrounding identity are precisely about categorization by others, in terms of gesturing toward the necessity to focus upon 'identities' and refuse them at the same time. She insists women take this up, act upon it. At one and the same time, feminists suggest that "women" don't exist, and maintain a politics of "as if they existed" with the analysis of the category of women, the feminist account is anti-essentialist, there is "no underlying core of persons to whom the descriptions of women bandied about over history have actually applied" (Riley, 1988, 112).

"Women" is discursively constructed, and in internal relations with other

categories which are themselves changing or at issue. "Women is a volatile collectivity in which female persons can be very differently positioned, so the apparent continuity of the subject of women isn't to be relied on." (Riley, 1988, 2) Riley says that what "Foucault did for the concept of the homosexual as an invented classification just cannot be done for women, who indubitably existed long before the nineteenth century unfolded its tedious mania for fresh categorizations." (Riley, 1988, 3) She speaks about the positioning of women, in the use of the category "women". "This positioning occurs both in language, forms of description, and what gets carried out, so that it is misleading to set up a combat for superiority between the two." (Riley, 1988, 3) This recognition that positioning occurs in discourse and activities may be quite accurate, but Riley does not give an account of why it is so simple to accomplish the positioning. It is possible because generally, people rely on a traditional notion of category, as descriptive of universal common elements; wish to uncover commonable experiences, universally held, and essentializing tendencies, common because the beings in question are said to have common properties. It is by relying on the construction of category as property-based, that Riley commits her "category" mistake. There are different forms of categories, with different applications.

Haraway's understanding of "gender" as relational is more on the mark: she says that "gender is a relationship, not a preformed category of beings, or a possession one can have. Gender does not pertain more to women than to men, it isn't about women as such, in spite of its origin as an explanation of women ... Gender is the relation between variously constituted categories of men and women (and variously arranged tropes), differentiated by nation, generation, class, lineage, colour, and much else)" (Haraway, 1997, 28) Thus, "men" too is unstable, in the definitions of all the great gender configurings performed by Hegel, by Kant, Hume, Augustine, by Rousseau; Beavouir; everyone gives each gender contradictory and unstable input.

Social categories have been mistakenly treated as "property-oriented", viz., regarding colour, genitalia, emotional or rational attributes; having such "features" or "properties" enables certain expectations and stereotypes of women and men; social categories are rather relational, not about identifying properties of bodies, experiences, or faculties, but are discourses about how persons stand in relation to one another; or how persons stand in relation to nature; they are real political categories, whether of nature, humanity, sex, gender, ethnicity; the meanings of war, power, abuse, homosexuality. Since social categories are constituted by relationships, they shift as their relations shift. Meanings also shift, and feminists have tried to keep shifting the meanings, sometimes in order precisely to avoid any essentializing tendencies. But sometimes meanings shift opportunistically as in the texts of the canon, they shift to make it impossible to fix the significance of the political consequences, and they avoid the critique of "essentializing" while at the same time maintaining a power over those actually figured by the contradictory meanings of the categories. Consider, for example, how in Carole Pateman's work on social contract theory, she discusses how the liberal household shifts to take women as "workers" into itself, and retain the public/private realms, and the division of labour remaining much the same. The shift in taking women in to the workplace does not have any revolutionary affects, but rather congeals the already present, and problematized, public/private divisions, and divisions of labour in the household.

Confusions abound in response to the issues of a crisis in definition, regarding the options for re-vising our understanding of this category. The suggestion of an "independent" category, which is one we will look at briefly, will that not be

simply reversing the oppressive strategy that is arguably extant, resulting in a new dichotomous polarity, with women at the top, and everything that is "not-women" in the formless chaos? Again, how can one create a "neutral" category, or pseudoneutral - how can persons do this, taking into account the significant dimensions of race and culture? Can one have a category of "women" without acknowledging the constitutive relationships of race and culture? that too would marginalize, would ignore aspects of elements which constitute the political movement, the metaphysical realities, of "women". The problem with "women", as traditionally defined, was in part a problem to do with definition of species; biological taxonomy, "what one is". If one disavows a connection between species categories and social categories, and takes "women", "men", "nature", as social political categories where species, and set membership, are not the issues, one can see many more possibilities available for ontologies. One cannot have closure against identity categories of this kind, no metaphysical identity closures for social categories.

In a paper called "The Necessity of Differences: Constructing a Positive Category of Women", Marilyn Frye reminds us about Loreena Bobbitt, describing two "styles of white feminism" which tried to respond to her actions, and in Frye's view failed. Frye's position is intended to open up some space, philosophical/political space, to show plural identities as essential to categories. A central element in her argument, which contributes to my purpose, is her suggestion to her readers that women have to construct a logically positive category, without reference to other categories as such, e.g. without reference to men, and without reference to any essentializing qualities. The suggestion that one cannot have reference to essentializing features will not surprise any who have encountered postmodern or poststructuralist writings. What Frye means to criticize is essentially the property-oriented labelling that has occurred in category construction. (Frye, 1996, 992)

"Until a positive category of women is historically constructed, the man/woman distinction will be the A/not-A universal and exclusive dichotomy it cannot be dismantled or deconstructed by being folded in on itself." (Frye, 1996, 997) Frye claims that "defining" does not have to be essentializing. She argues that what she calls "pseudodualistic monism" is not the only kind of logic of categories, (Frye, 1996, 997) claiming there is a logic of category construction congenial to this project as a practice of pluralism. Frye rejects the idea that there is anything to be gained by trying to appropriate and revalue any parts or aspects of patriarchally constructed femininity, a strategy taken by some feminists. Frye notices that after all two is a plurality, logically, since there is really a pseudo-dualism in the case of gender. In her essay, Frye suggests that, in reality, " A/ not A" is **not** a dualism: it does not construct two things; i.e. the category of vanilla and the category of not vanilla - the second one is an infinite undifferentiated plenum, unstructured, formless, a chaos; no internal boundaries". Frye is suggesting that the dualistic dichotomous position, is only rhetorical, not at all a matter of logical relations, it does not reflect reality. The rhetorical device of "not distinguishing" also operates: "the man/not-man dichotomy makes no distinctions on the not-man side. This helps make it so "natural" to lump women indiscriminately with children in "women and children" and to cast "nature" (which is another name of not-man) as a woman, and woman as nature". (Frye, 1996, 1000) It also illuminates the fact that women are so easily associated with disorder, chaos, irrationality, and impurity. ... the set-theoretic mold actually is rhetorically powerful." She asks what we need "for something to precipitate out of the infinite undifferentiated plenum."

Presence of internal structure, Frye says, establishes the setting off of a thing or a sort of thing (a category) from its environment. Structure is a set of

relations; and relations stand between differentiated individuals in the case of the category of "women", and these relations are internal relations within the category. One of Frye's messages is that creating this category is a liberation strategy. 'Women' themselves name themselves; call themselves "women", call attention to the politics necessary for their emancipation. In the type of category to which she refers, centrality of differences among women is understood as important to the constructive political project. Differences amount to some kind of internal structure, in that the various interwoven relationships among the movements within the feminist movement, constitute "women", as do, precisely, relations outside of the category. Thus, various groupings of women come together, with varying aims - perhaps an artists' collective, a musician's collective, groups of women come together sometimes to lobby for health care changes; each of these groupings too, has interactions with others within the category, and their differing forms of specializations, their different interests and experiences, give structure to the category that is being developed. But in all of these, we are not determining "features" that are universalizable, that are commonable characteristics that are substantive, it is the relations themselves that are substantive, the elements, the persons, that are substantive.

Frye is right; one does not necessarily essentialize, in defining, if one is recognizing relations as constitutive of such social categories. The point, in part, is that philosophy has always been riddled through with politics, but if one does not focus on the politics, it is difficult to see it. In Haraway's naming of gender as a power relation, determined by those in power, we see an overlap in meaning with Frye; in order to establish a category of women, women claim their identities as relational with others, it is only "women" who can create the category. Frye and Haraway each finds that women have been named in particular negating ways by oppressive practices of language and culture. There is, from my own point of view, a confusion that appears to be suggested in Frye, that an external observer cannot fail to "essentialize" or to find commonable features that essentialize. If a philosopher is careful to examine the relations and elements which constitute categories, it is not necessary to essentialize, and thus, one can have a regard for relations among social categories that does not replicate the supposed or alleged dichotomies, or pseudo-neutral monisms. It is possible to come to some understanding, even from outside the category, of what is being constituted.

A category such as "women" is being defined by internal relations and differences, and not by negating others, or other groups, says Frye. Meanings and subjectivities are generated not by negation but by "multiple nonoppositional contrasts and relations among, and constituting, positive elements." (Frye, 1996, 1003) Here she refers to the nonoppositional contrasts among features, negation of features or properties as inessential to social category formations. It is not necessary to refer to such features, either with respect to women, or to men, in these social categories.

Part Four: conclusions

The paradox to which I refer in the introduction is a "rhetorical" paradox, in the "closing down" form of rhetoric, but it is a spurious form, not a compelling rhetoric. It is itself a fiction which invalidates, which dismisses rather than opens up political spaces. Simply because some categories are impossible to mould into the property-based analyses available in nominalism, realism and conceptualism, we do not therefore accept that categories such as "women", "men", "nature", are really "meaningless". A relational logic, not a logic of the thing and its properties, discloses a great deal about social categories. Rhetoric is an important, and visible, feature of social categories. It always **has**

been. When "what one is" is one's species - for so long - in the shadow of Aristotle, then taxonomy is itself functioning in a fundamentally rhetorical fashion. If we think of belonging to a social category as participation, as choosing to identify ourselves as participating in a category, then it becomes more a matter of relations, of affinities we choose, elective affinities. If what I am is constantly being co-constructed with and in relation to different others, there is no single absolute "what I am", in spite of relatively stable contextual frames.

It is rhetoric, on the part of the 'realist', to insist that there has to be some kind of universal property- oriented definition, to insist that social categories too, must fit into the kind of categorical slot that books and tables do, and even if that categorical slot is one which attempts to uncover "essential" experiences that women have, that differentiate women from men. Properties, essential qualities, must be determinative, such a realist would say, of nature or reality that will help us to identify 'x' as a thing of that sort. There is a place for categories which operate as definitions, just as there is a place for binary dualisms; the lamp is on or off. It may depend upon how sunny the day is, but it is either "on" or "off" in my study. But of course "on" is defined by being distinguished from "off".

Does this mean that feminists cannot be metaphysical realists? Of course they will not be, if we understand realism in the way described above. If we alter our understanding of both metaphysics and realism, and recognize that our ontology cannot be one of properties and things, but must be an ontology of relations among persons as elements in relation, some form of realism is possible. Indeed the mode of construction of the social category suggest that to be significant within the construction.

The point is, it is the members of the category who have to be self-determining in this way. They affirm membership of the category, "women" - not some "other", who in figuring the members with certain properties oppresses. In this way, we can see that one feature of a nominalist position is taken by this account, that categories are constructed, but the aspect of nominalism that regards essential attributes or properties as identity features is rejected. There are differences acceptable within the category, otherness within the category, rather than between varying definitions of properties common to persons. The paradox is spurious, "women" are not trying to name ourselves, and refrain from being named, or essentialize ourselves and at the same time deny essentialism - it is not a form of self-deception, or philosophical invalidation. A movement of this kind is surely about the problems of essentializing because of the misapplication of categories as either nominalist, or realist. Those who employ this argument against feminists are using categories from a property-oriented logic; the classes, which focus on salient properties common to things. If we employ a logic wherein categories are principally comprised of relations, the social categories are relationships, self determining among persons, and are logically positive (i.e. not negated "attributes" of some other category), are non-essentializing, and yet are also explanatory. Feminists have gestured continuously to the reality that there never has been a stable property-based definition of women; that relations have always constituted the meanings of women, and of men, of gender itself. This surely is a form of realism. Social category construction is both rhetorical, and logical, that is to say, it employs, explicitly employs, the politics of identity, and the politics itself reveals both the rhetoric and the logic of category construction.

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